


UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

# SCENT CONTROL FOR

By **Chuck Adams**  
B&C Professional Member  
Photos courtesy of Author

A photograph of a hunter in full camouflage gear, including a hat and gloves, aiming a bow in a forest. The hunter is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the frame, looking intently at the camera. The background is filled with dense evergreen trees and branches, with sunlight filtering through the canopy, creating a dappled light effect. The overall tone is natural and focused.

Getting close to big game on foot requires careful wind management. Keep the breeze in your favor, or you will be out of luck!

# CONTROL HUNTERS

“Maybe I should start an invisible cream company,” I chuckled to a friend of mine as we relaxed in whitetail camp. “I’ll bet I could sell a ton of the stuff!”

We were discussing several bowhunters who took big game scent control to an extreme. These guys laundered their clothes in scent-free soap each night, and sealed those duds in huge ziplock bags with pine and cedar boughs before they went to bed. After rising extra-early the next morning, they would shower in scent-free soap, slip on their pleasant-smelling garb, and sit all day in their tree stands.

Funny thing about that. The half dozen archers who shot nice bucks that particular week did none of the extreme-scent stuff. They erected their stands downwind from high-use deer areas, wore all-rubber boots to and from their stands to prevent lingering human odor on the ground, and waited patiently for deer to mosey by.

As one of the pine-bough crowd left this outfitted camp empty-handed, he snarled something about how some bowhunters have all the luck. I could have told him he never could have shot a buck from the stand he had placed dead upwind from a promising food plot, but I did not want a fight. The guy was clearly sleep-deprived and grumpy from all that useless showering, laundering, and clothes-bagging. I hope he was more cheerful after he went home and got eight or nine hours of Z’s.

During the past few decades, I have marveled at the gullibility of some big game hunters. Many seem to want a shortcut to hunting success. People buy scent-eliminating products with the genuine belief that all this

**Scent eliminating spray and all-rubber boots can let a hunter walk to and from a stand without leaving lingering odor behind.**

stuff actually works. Baloney about scent control is rampant in advertising, and is piled even higher by some outdoor pundits. One guy recently conducted a seminar at a large sports show and suggested that bowhunters should soak their clothes in gasoline or diesel fuel if they planned to hunt near busy highways. After all, cars and trucks smell like fuel, right?

Wearing foul, health-hazardous petrol would probably cause your wife to consider divorce the first time she tried to launder your clothes. Gasoline or diesel are almost as nasty as skunk scent, which you can actually buy in glass bottles from several hunting scent outlets. The handful of fellows I know who use skunk scent do not have any hunting friends, and they don’t shoot any more deer than anybody else, either.

Thinking you can easily (or not so

easily) fool a buck or bull’s ultra-sensitive nose really makes no more sense than thinking you could slather on my new “invisible cream” and instantly disappear from sight. One prominent game biologist has estimated that a whitetail deer has a nose over 3,000 times more sensitive than yours or mine. I don’t have a clue how he calculated this, but I believe it. Based on many years of hunting experience, I am here to tell you that in most cases, you cannot fool big game when you end up on the upwind side.

Deer, elk, bear, wild sheep, and other wild creatures occasionally doubt what they see or hear. They might linger, snorting or stamping a foot as they gawk toward a potentially dangerous sight or sound. But an animal never doubts its nose. *Never*. If it gets a whiff of human body odor, it will flee as if goosed by a cattle prod. The nose is every



**ABOVE:** Chuck shot this super-wide mule deer after hunting uphill with an early-morning thermal downdraft in his face.

**BELOW:** A steady prevailing breeze allowed Chuck to sneak within 12 yards of this massive Alaska brown bear. One whiff of Chuck, and the 10-foot, 8-1/2-inch monster would have been gone, or worse.



game animal's primary survival sense. The nose knows. A serious hunter should never forget that.

There are several types of commercial scent control products that hunters routinely buy. The least effective, in my experience, are odor-masking liquids or gels. The theory goes that if you smear enough red fox urine, apple scent, fresh earth liquid, cedar oil, or another equally pungent concoction on your body or foliage near your stand, a buck or bull will not smell you.

I have never seen such potions actually work. I am sure that every downwind critter smells the combination of commercial product and human B.O., instantly identifies the danger and runs or sneaks away. More often than not, hunters are not even aware they have been busted, because animals routinely sniff danger from hundreds of yards downwind. I have seen elk, deer, and other species flee across giant canyons when they sniffed a hunter on the other side.

Commercial scent-blocking liquids are meant to eliminate surface odor on clothes, boots, and equipment. These were first formulated to cancel cat urine and other pet odors that sometimes permeate carpet in homes. I do believe that similar products for hunters have limited, targeted value in big game hunting. When combined with all-rubber, calf-high or hip-high boots, spraying a scent blocking agent on your lower body can prevent lingering human odor where you walk... especially when grass, leaves, and bushes are damp and prone to retain your scent. If a deer wanders by later, it is not likely to smell that you were there.

Carbon scent suits and similar odor-absorbing garments are all the rage with hunters—especially bowhunters. But separating fact from fiction is difficult. Did the buck walk past you because you were scent-free, or did air currents simply not reach his nose?

In my opinion, scent-absorbing suits are never foolproof. Sure, if you are hunting metropolitan whitetails that smell nearby people every

day, a 95-percent reduction in your own scent might fool a nearby deer long enough to give you a shot. But the jury is out on just how effective such garments really are. I have tried every scent garment on the market, and my experience tells me that nothing can fool a downwind animal every time. Wild noses are simply too keen to be duped, even if you reduce most of your body odor and sit quietly on stand without working up a stinky sweat.

Most commercial scent-control items are sold with tree-stand or ground-blind hunters specifically in mind. If you plan to stalk or still-hunt, good hygiene and a boatload of scent-blocking products are worthless. Five minutes after you start hiking, your perspiration will overpower any scent-free soap, odor-eliminating spray, or scent-absorbing suit. You might as well smoke a cigar.

One sort of scent product does work well when skillfully employed. Rutting deer lure—both doe-in-estrus urine and buck urine—can draw in bucks when the time and situation are right. A little—stress LITTLE—dabbed on foliage near a stand or in a nearby scrape can pull in a downwind buck during the rut. But only if you are off to one side so your own scent does not reach that animal.

All in all, I believe that hunting is meant to be difficult—especially at close range. That is what makes it so special, and that is what makes taking a wary animal so thrilling. If hunters could eliminate their odor, magically become invisible, and never make a sound, they would not be hunters at all. They would be killers, because their prey would not have a chance. For this reason, the fact that commercial scent products have limited value does not bother me at all.

A really good close-range hunter with gun or bow always plays the wind. He makes a point of knowing prevailing breeze directions in his area—morning, midday, and evening—and learns to always sit or move with the wind to the front or side of his face, never from behind. He knows to avoid areas with fickle wind, like under bluffs near ridge tops. He hunts uphill into cool thermal downdrafts near dawn and dusk in mountainous places. He knows that warming air rises between late morning and early afternoon, and hunts downhill instead of uphill at such times.

And when an animal gets lucky and sniffs a contrary breeze, the serious hunter shrugs and probably laughs. He knows that a critter's nose is its first line of defense. That's hunting, and if you don't learn to keep the wind in your favor and hope for the best, you are doomed to be disappointed! ■